

Testimony from Jonathan Byrd: MI Laborers' District Council

RE: SB 1085

Let me first start by thanking the House Commerce Committee for allowing me to discuss the very important issue regarding a public entities' right to enter into so-called Project Labor Agreements.

My name is Jonathan Byrd and I am the Legislative Director for the Michigan Laborers' Union.

In principle, and substantially by detail, the Michigan Laborers' District Council, and the 12,000 Union Construction Laborers we represent, opposes SB 1085, which removes an effective method for local municipalities to ensure a construction project is completed safely, on time, and often under budget.

As a general principle, the Michigan Laborers' believe that PLA's are a useful tool that currently is only an option for municipalities to specifically outline their expectations for how work should be performed on a job site.

As it relates specifically to SB 1085, the Michigan Laborers' believe that this legislation is quite simply another attack on unions because the non-union construction sector wants more opportunity to use cheap, unsafe, and often times illegal or misclassified labor to pad their pockets at the expense of workers and our local communities.

PLA's have been leveraged for public projects for nearly 80 years. This is because they reduce the uncertainty that is inherent in large scale construction projects through the establishment of terms and conditions up front. This creates a framework for both labor and management that fosters greater jobsite efficiencies and ensures an uninterrupted supply of highly trained, skilled workers, an asset the non-union does not enjoy.

Many cities, townships, school districts, community colleges and universities understand, through the use of PLAs, the economic benefits of workers that participate in joint union-contractor apprenticeship programs that allow for higher quality work and fewer jobsite accidents that saves taxpayer money in the long run. Let's be clear, the non-union, which does not represent a significant portion of the construction workforce in this State, supports this legislation because they do not offer the services and training that is offered by the building trades and our management partners.

For example, our Training Fund partners with Community Colleges and Universities around the State in an effort to produce workers with the skill sets they need to be successful in the job market. I beg the question, should not these same institutions be able to require the same level of standards on the workforce constructing their classrooms as they require of their students?

The facts are this, PLA's guarantee that every worker, regardless of union status, has access to high-quality benefits for the efficient work they perform under hazardous conditions.

We hope you clearly understand our steadfast opposition to this legislation and will strongly consider taking any position in what is unmistakably another attack on organized labor and dedicated local workers who want jobs in our tough economy.

Simply put, the Michigan Laborers' believe that this legislation should not be voted out of Committee and we ask for a 'No' vote.

I would like to again thank the Committee for allowing me to address this issue. On behalf of the Michigan Laborers' and all construction workers in this State, I ask for your opposition to this bill. I am available to answer any questions that the Committee may have.